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AN

Epistle of Caution

TO

FRIENDS,

To keep on their

Inward Armour,

In this Day of

Outward Ease.

By *T. G.*

LONDON,

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Epiſtle of Caution

T O

FRIENDS, &c.

Dear Friends,

IT was the Lot and Portion of many of our elder Friends, Brethren and Siſters, about Forty Years ſince, to endure many a bitter Exerciſe of ſevere Perſecution; not being able to promiſe themſelves the Enjoyment of their Eſtates, Country, Wives, Children, Friends, or Liberty; being often haled away to Gaols and Priſons, and expoſed to frequent Fines and Baniſhments: Nevertheleſs, under all, the *Word of God* grew, and they were thereby exceedingly Comforted; and in and over all their great Tribulations, were reſolved to hold the better part, which could not be taken from them.

Yet, notwithſtanding theſe many Exerciſes, the Number of the Faithful increaſed, and many were added to the Church; and the Faithful Sufferers met with great Incouragement from the Lord; and many became purified, and made white, and were preſerved in theſe Days of Trial; ſo that our common Adverſary got no Advantage by thoſe violent Courſes.

But he being a ſubtil Serpent, and finding his Endeavours then fruſtrated, and his little ſucceſs that way: He now tries what he can do in this Time of Eaſe, which hath been for ſome Years, and the Sufferings in general very little, (although ſome have undergone ſome particular Inſtances of grievous Perſecution) yet for the generality of Friends, there hath been a Time of Peace, a Day of Tranquility; which, it would do well, we might carefully and faithfully improve, for the Increaſe of our Talents.

The Conſideration of theſe things falling on me, brought a Concern with it, to viſit you, my dear *Friends*, with this ſhort *Epiſtle*, by way of Caution; that we may now, in this Day, watch againſt the inward Adverſary and Perſecutor, who is as buſie as ever he was: And although he may not ſo beſtir himſelf, as ſometimes here-

heretofore, to draw us from the Profeſſion of Truth; he is however cloſely at work, to keep us out of the Life of it, and out of the ſweet Savour of it; that, notwithſtanding our Profeſſion, we may become as fruitleſs Branches, which in time, comes to be quite ſeparate from the Vine; and ſo to be burned.

And as he is a crafty Adverſary, he hath many ways to betray the Fooliſh, and to cozen the Careleſs, and ſuit his Baits to the Inclinations of thoſe he hath deſigns on; and ſome being apt to ſatisfie themſelves, that they are now come to the Profeſſion of Truth, and ſuppoſe all is well, and that there is not ſuch need for a daily Watchfulneſs, a daily Renewing of Strength, and walking forward in the Way of Truth, as hath been, and is often preached and declared in our Meetings; but if they can hold an outward Conformity, they think it's enough; and ſuch become unacquainted with that Living Zeal, and Fervent Concern, which reſted on the Spirits of our Elder Friends; in which, the Lord was with them, and mightily endued them with Power from on high; and they grew in Knowledge, and the Love of Truth, as aforeſaid: And ſo may we, at this day, if we are duly diligent and watchful againſt

the Adverſary of our Souls, looking to the Lord for his daily Aſſiſtance, and place our greateſt Conſolation in him.

Dear Friends, If we learn well that Commandment, *Thou ſhalt love the Lord with all thy Heart, with all thy Soul, with all thy Mind and Strength*, it will be naturally delightful to wait on him; and thoſe who wait on him, renew their Strength; which they, who wander from him, never do. Therefore be adviſed, and let not a Form of Godlineſs, without the Power, ſuffice any. Search for the *hidden Vertue*, that you may know and feel Chriſt Jeſus, the Son of the Living God, to be with you, and in you, whereby you may draw near unto him; and may not ſatisfie your ſelves in an old, dry, formal Profeſſion of Truth; but make War in Righteouſneſs, and keep in the bleſſed Faith; following the Footſteps of thoſe, who thereby obtained the Promiſes:

And then you will be preſerved from placing your chief Comfort in this World, or in the things of it, which have been a Snare to many; which, while they have followed after, they have erred from the Faith, and wounded their Souls thereby. And many have been intangled in this Snare, the rather, becauſe it is of innocent Reputation, and a kind of Duty, to provide for thoſe under our Tuition. And

And ſome know no Bounds to their Deſires, in this caſe; but when they have obtained, it may be, ten-times as much as they once ever expected, they are then as far from Content and Satisfaction of their Deſires; nay, farther than they were when they firſt launched forth: So that thoſe things have been as Bryars and Thorns, which choak the good Seed of the Kingdom: Whereas, had ſuch diligently waited upon the Lord, and attended for the Renewings of his Living Word, they might have been of good Service in and among the Churches; but by reaſon of giving their Hearts and Strength to the Service of this World, they come to be utterly Unſerviceable, and like the barren Heath in the Deſart, which ſeeth not when Good comes: Nay, ſome have grown ſo unacquainted with the Life and Vertue, which from the Head, *Chriſt*, flows to every living Member, that they become as Limbs out of Joynt; which are uſually a great Grief and Pain to the Body.

Therefore, *dear Friends*, accept with Meekneſs and Conſideration, the Word of Exhortation, which hath been often communicated, and is now again renewed: That you may be diligent and watchful in all your Converſation, keep on your Heavenly

Armour, on your Right Hand, and on your Left; there is as much need of it now, as ever there was; you who preſs hard after Chriſt Jeſus, find it ſo: Your Health is in Him, your Strength and Stay in Him alone; who of God, is made your *Wiſdom*, *Righteouſneſs*, *Sanctification* and *Redemption*. Therefore labour to make ſure of Him; as knowing, if God giveth us his Son, he will, with Him, give us all things that pertain to *Life* and *Godlineſs*.

But Oh! How eaſily are ſome ſatisfied, without ever coming to be acquainted with ſuch a Labour! And theſe are unconcerned, whether the Heavenly Plant grows, or not. They are, it may be, greatly concerned as to the World, and the things of it; there is no end of their Labour nor Travel under the Sun: But Oh! How faint, how remiſs, how careleſs have theſe been, when they come to Meetings! Their Minds taken up with Earthly and Senſual Matters: Whereas, *What ſhall we eat? What ſhall we drink? Wherewithal ſhall we be cloathed?* Was that the *Gentiles* ſought after: But *Chriſtian People*, Profeſſors of the true Religion, were adviſed to *ſeek God's Kingdom*, and its *Righteouſneſs*, in the firſt place; and then other neceſſary Enjoyments ſhould be added; ſuch as God ſaw fit, and not what

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the Covetouſneſs or Ambition of Men might ſeem to crave.

And the Examples of ſome are evident, who by continuing ſuch a careleſs courſe of Profeſſion, and who, it may be, once thought they had as firm hold of Truth as thou haſt; yet have grown ſo far degenerated and depraved, as to Malign, Reproach, and endeavour to Perſecute that way in which once they might have had Fellowſhip with us, and have been partakers of the precious Life of Jeſus: But endeavouring to ſet up themſelves, and not the Chriſt of God, notwithſtanding their great Pretences in that caſe, have not forborn to ſpeak evil of the faithful Profeſſors and Publiſhers of his Truth; ſuch having their Conſciences ſeared as with an hot Iron, have prepared themſelves in their fallen Wiſdom, to deviſe Arguments, to juſtifie (not what they think right, but) whatever may ſeem to ſuit their preſent temporal Intereſts, and on the ſame account would, with like Arrogance, ſet themſelves to invent and produce Arguments for juſtification of the Popiſh Hierarchy, their ſeven Sacraments, and Tranſubſtantiation it ſelf, rather than give God the Glory, Repent, Return, and Acknowledge their Backſlidings.

However,

However, we ſhall leave them to the Lord, who beholds all their wicked Perverſions. And whatever Clamour or Noiſe thoſe may make for a ſeaſon, Let it not diſcourage you in your Travels; Fear not the Inſultings of *Moab*, nor the Revilings of the Children of *Ammon*; conſider on whom you have believed, and remember it was ſpoken by a worthy Apoſtle of our Profeſſion, *Likewiſe of your ſelves ſhall Men ariſe, ſpeaking perverſe Things, endeavouring to draw Diſciples after them:* But the Foundation of God ſtands ſure, on which know your Habitation; and let all theſe things draw you nearer to Chriſt, that by him you may be dayly led in the ways of Sobriety, and Temperance, and Juſtice, and Godlineſs, to the Praiſe of his worthy Name.

So, *Dear Friends*, take heed leaſt at any time your Hearts are overcome, and ſo Intemperance prevail over you, intemperate Cares, intemperate Love of the World, theſe are very Treacherous, having a ſpecious Cover, it being a Chriſtian Duty to provide for our own Houſe; but too too many extend it beyond meaſure, and grow boundleſs in their Appetites, and Purſuit after the Things of this Life.

And thoſe become ill Precedents and Examples to the Young, and to the lately Convinced,

vinced, who looking at them, may grow ſlack alſo in their ſpiritual Travel, and imagine a Profeſſion of Truth to be ſufficient, tho' they are unacquainted with the Vertue of it; ſo that ſome ſit down by the way, and grow unmindful of that tender Concern was once upon them, for obtaining the Lord's Preſence, when *One Day in his Courts* was accounted *better than a Thouſand*; and a *Door-keeper's place in his Houſe*, beyond the higheſt Preferments.

But as this firſt Love and primitive Tenderneſs comes to be neglected, ſo a light airy Spirit prevails, that loves not, but rather ſhuns a Fellowſhip with Chriſt in his Sufferings, which is, however, the true way to come to Reign with him, and the Path by which he hath brought, and is bringing, many of his Servants to Glory. Yet this State of Suffering hath been tedious to ſome, they have found eaſier ways and Methods to pleaſe themſelves: Poverty of Spirit, Hungering and Thirſting after Righteouſneſs, Affliction and Mourning, have had in them no deſirable Beauty (to ſuch) tho' they are incompaſſed with excellent Bleſſings. *We will not chuſe this way*, ſay ſome, and ſo chuſe their own ways, which are not God's ways; and thoſe came to be at eaſe in *Sion*, and to truſt in the Moun-

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tain of their Profeſſion, but are not griev'd at the Afflictions of *Joſeph*, nor are ever Witneſſes of his mighty Deliverance.

So, *Friends*, Let us not deceive our ſelves, nor make the way of Truth broader than the Lord hath made it, or our elder Brethren did find it, who through many Tribulations are enter'd his Kingdom: But live the Life of Faith, it's a ſpiritual Life, an heart-ſearching Life, where the hidden Things of *Eſau* are diſcover'd, and his Mountain laid waſte: Look to the end of your Race, in which as People run, with Hope to obtain, they do not idly Gaze round about them, nor Entangle themſelves in thoſe Nets which will cauſe their Feet to fall. *Luſts of the Eye*, are ſuch Nets; *Luſts of the Fleſh*, are ſuch Nets. But, it may be, the World, and the Deſires and Allurements thereof, being eſteemed by many Innocent, may be the largeſt Net of all, the Bait in that caſe being more clearly hidden.

It is now a ſeaſon calls for Watchfulneſs; Was the Adverſary buſy among our elder Brethren, to Diſtreſs and Perſecute them, who were of the Number, that were ſaid to be *Deſtitute*, *Afflicted and Tormented*? Or think you he is now fallen aſleep, or leſs buſy in his endeavours than in former Days?

Days? No, ſurely. Thou who liveſt unſenſible of his many Temptations, art neareſt to be prevailed on, and thy poor Soul to be Impriſoned in Chains, under Darkneſs; for he cares not what thy Profeſſion be, if he can but eſtrange thee from the Life of Jeſus, and from a Fellowſhip with him, and conſequently from the Kingdom of Heaven: So that we have cauſe to keep upon our Watch-Tower, *having on the Armour of Light*, truſting in the Lord for ever; for in the Lord-Jehovah is Everlaſting Strength.

And, *Dear Friends*, you whom the Lord hath granted many Years unto, under the Profeſſion of Truth, and who are dignified with the Honour of Elders, your care ought to be great to diſcharge your Duty with Faithfulneſs: The Eyes of many young Ones are on you. We have a great many grown up among us, who have been educated in the Profeſſion of the Truth, over whom you ought to be watchful, for their Good; and be you diligently and faithfully concerned in the Places where God hath ſet you: He that exerciſes the Office of an Elder well, hath purchaſed to himſelf a good Degree, and great Boldneſs in the Faith.

For,

For, it's not only hearing Truth Preached and Declared in Meetings, will do; but you muſt Labour together, with the faithful Miniſters of the Word, and then the Lord will be your Rock, and your exceeding great Reward: Let not Negligence, Fondneſs, or fooliſh Indulgence hinder you in the Exerciſe of that Authority God hath given you, to Exhort, to Admoniſh or Rebuke, as the Occaſion requires; but take ye heed unto your ſelves, and unto the Flock over which the Holy Ghoſt hath made you Overſeers.

That Young and Old may be ſtrengthned through God's Power, and be endued with that Spiritual Wiſdom, that you may be able to withſtand the Devil in all his various Appearances, and that the ſame ancient Zeal and Love of God may abound amongſt us, as did among our elder Brethren many Years ago, who loved not their Lives, Liberties or Eſtates, ſo as to be kept thereby from their Duty and Fervency of Spirit, in ſeeking and ſerving the Lord; but ſtood looſe to the World, and the Things of it, that they might be bound to the Lord in an indiſſolvable Covenant. This will be to us the greateſt Benefit and everlaſting Advantage, in that Day which approaches and comes on a-pace, when it

ſhall

ſhall be ſaid to the Righteous, *Come, ye Bleſſed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you*; and to thoſe who are Wicked, and Obey not the Truth, *Go, ye Curſed, &c.*

It is ſure, that Inheritance will be a ſufficient Recompence unto all, who in this World have gone through many Tribulations, through much Mourning and Affliction, Waiting on the Lord, and Worſhipping him in Spirit and Truth, for there all Tears ſhall be wiped from their Eyes, and Sorrow and Sighing ſhall be no more, when thoſe who Laugh now (who have had their Conſolation in this Life) ſhall Mourn and Lament for evermore.

Knowledge hath not been ſo much wanting among many of you, as a lively Faith, a fervent Zeal, and Love to the Lord and his Truth; which, that the Lord may by his bleſſed Spirit working in you, renew and increaſe every Day, more and more, is the Deſire and Prayer of your Friend in Sincerity, and Brother in Tribulation and Patience,

Tho. Gwin.

The 12th of the 7th
Month, 1701.

FINIS.